

Printed for the War Cabinet. December 1939.

MOST SECRET.

Copy No. 28

W.P. (39) 162.

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WAR CABINET.

NORWAY—IRON-ORE TRAFFIC.

Note by the First Lord of the Admiralty.

THE effectual stoppage of the Norwegian ore supplies to Germany ranks as a major offensive operation of war. No other measure is open to us for many months to come which gives so good a chance of abridging the waste and destruction of the conflict, or of perhaps preventing the vast slaughters which will attend the grapple of the main armies.

2. If the advantage is held to outweigh the obvious and serious objections, the whole process of stoppage must be enforced. The ore from Luleå is already stopped by the winter's ice, which must not be broken by the Soviet ice-breaker, should it be attempted. The ore from Narvik must be stopped by laying successively a series of small minefields in Norwegian territorial waters at the two or three suitable points on the coast, which will force the ships carrying ore to Germany to quit territorial waters, and come on to the high seas, where, if German, they will be taken as prize, or, if neutral, subjected to our contraband control. The ore from Oxelosund, the main ice-free port in the Baltic, must also be prevented from leaving by methods which will be neither diplomatic nor military. All these three ports must be dealt with in various appropriate ways as soon as possible.

3. Thus it is not a question of denying Germany a mere million tons between now and May, but of cutting off her whole winter supply except the negligible amounts that can be got from Gäddede, or other minor ice-free Baltic ports. Germany would therefore undergo a severe deprivation, tending to crisis before the summer. But when the ice melts in the Gulf of Bothnia the abundant supply from Luleå would again be open, and Germany is no doubt planning, not only to get as much as she can during the winter, but to make up the whole 9½ million tons which she needs, or even more, between the 1st May and the 15th December, 1940. After this she might hope to organise Russian supplies and be able to wage a very long war.

4. It may well be that, should we reach the month of May with Germany starving for ore for her industries and her munitions, the prevention of the

[20491]

reopening of Lulea may become a principal Naval objective. The laying of a declared minefield, including magnetic mines, off Lulea by British submarines would be one way. There are others. If Germany can be cut from all Swedish ore supplies from now onwards till the end of 1940, a blow will have been struck at her war-making capacity equal to a first-class victory in the field or from the air, and without any serious sacrifice of life. It might, indeed, be immediately decisive.

5. To every blow struck in war there is a counter. If you fire at the enemy he will fire back. It is most necessary, therefore, to face squarely the counter-measures which may be taken by Germany, or constrained by her from Norway or Sweden. As to Norway there are three pairs of events which are linked together. First, the Germans, conducting war in a cruel and lawless manner, have violated the territorial waters of Norway, sinking without warning or succour a number of British and neutral vessels. To that our response is to lay the minefields mentioned above. It is suggested that Norway, by way of protest, may cancel the valuable agreement we have made with her for chartering her tankers and other shipping. But then she would lose the extremely profitable bargain she has made with us, and this shipping would become valueless to her in view of our contraband control. Her ships would be idle, and her owners impoverished. It would not be in Norwegian interests for her Government to take this step; and interest is a powerful factor. Thirdly, Norway could retaliate by refusing to export to us the aluminium and other war materials which are important to the Air Ministry and the Ministry of Supply. But here again her interests would suffer. Not only would she not receive the valuable gains which this trade brings her, but Great Britain, by denying her Bauxite and other indispensable raw materials, could bring the whole industry of Norway, centring upon Oslo and Bergen, to a complete standstill. In short, Norway, by retaliating against us, would be involved in economic and industrial ruin.

6. Norwegian sympathies are on our side, and her future independence from German over-lordship hangs upon the victory of the Allies. It is not reasonable to suppose that she will take either of the counter-measures mentioned above (although she may threaten them), unless she is forced to do so by German brute force.

7. This will certainly be applied to her anyway, and whatever we do, if Germany thinks it her interest to dominate forcibly the Scandinavian peninsula. In that case the war would spread to Norway and Sweden, and with our command of the seas there is no reason why French and British troops should not meet German invaders on Scandinavian soil. At any rate, we can certainly take and hold whatever islands or suitable points on the Norwegian coast we choose. Our northern blockade of Germany would then become absolute. We could, for instance, occupy Narvik and Bergen, and keep them open for our own trade while closing them completely to Germany. It cannot be too strongly emphasised that British control of the Norwegian coast-line is a strategic objective of first-class importance. It is not, therefore, seen how, even if retaliation by Germany were to run its full course, we should be worse off for the action now proposed. On the contrary, we have more to gain than lose by a German attack upon Norway or Sweden. This point is capable of more elaboration than is necessary here.

There is no reason why we should not manage to secure a large and long-continued supply of iron-ore from Sweden through Narvik while at the same time diverting all supplies of ore from Germany. This must be our aim.

8. The effect of our action against Norway upon world opinion and upon our own reputation must be considered. We have taken up arms in accordance with the principles of the Covenant of the League in order to aid the victims of German aggression. No technical infringement of International Law, so long as it is unaccompanied by inhumanity of any kind, can deprive us of the good wishes of neutral countries. No evil effect will be produced upon the greatest of all neutrals, the United States. We have reason to believe that they will handle the matter in the way most calculated to help us. And they are very resourceful.

9. The final tribunal is our own conscience. We are fighting to re-establish the reign of law and to protect the liberties of small countries. Our defeat would mean an age of barbaric violence, and would be fatal not only to ourselves, but to the independent life of every small country in Europe. Acting in the name of the Covenant, and as virtual mandatories of the League and all it stands for, we have a right, and, indeed, are bound in duty, to abrogate for a space some of the Conventions of the very laws we seek to consolidate and reaffirm. Small nations must not tie our hands when we are fighting for their rights and freedom. The letter of the law must not in supreme emergency obstruct those who are charged with its protection and enforcement. It would not be right or rational that the Aggressor Power should gain one set of advantages by tearing up all laws, and another set by sheltering behind the innate respect for law of their opponents. Humanity, rather than legality, must be our guide.

W. S. C.

December 16, 1939.
